

COUNTRY PROFILE: NIGERIA

Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) Status: Endemic

Overview

- Nigeria is one of only three remaining polio-endemic countries, along with Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- Nigeria is one of the most entrenched reservoirs of wild poliovirus in the world and the only country with ongoing transmission of all three serotypes: wild poliovirus type 1, wild poliovirus type 3, and circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2.
- States in the north of the country are the main source of polio infections elsewhere in Nigeria and in neighboring countries.

Context

- In the early 2000s, wild poliovirus transmission was interrupted in most of Nigeria but continued in the north of the country, as a result of weak health system and distrust due to rumors about vaccine side-effects.
- Polio virus from the northern states repeatedly re-infects polio-free states and neighboring countries. In response, federal authorities established an emergency task force, culminating in the signing of the Abuja Commitments to Polio Eradication by state Governors in February 2009. In addition, in mid-2009, His Eminence the Sultan of Sokoto established a National Task Team of Northern Traditional Leaders to address the situation, which resulted in significant improvements in supplementary immunization activities and a decline in polio cases.
- The widespread challenges polio transmission presents in Nigeria and neighboring countries are offset by consistently high per-dose efficacy of oral polio vaccine (OPV) and a low population immunity threshold, so greater success can potentially be achieved with fewer vaccination campaigns.

Challenges

- Political resistance to OPV still lingers in the north.
- Caregivers often lack understanding of polio and the necessity of multiple OPV doses, and fear that too many doses could be unsafe. In addition, many believe their children are not susceptible to polio and avoid OPV if they feel the risk of immunization is greater than the risk of the disease.

Key Actions Needed

- Institutionalize programme interventions to increase supplementary immunization coverage in the northern states
- Extend strategies employed at state level to the district level, identify the highest-risk districts and ensure that district chairpersons are engaged and accountable for the performance of immunization activities based on the local context and challenges.
- Scale up international technical support to intensify eradication activities.
- Expand social mobilization and communications capacity.
- Implement nationwide Immunization Plus Days to maintain high levels of population immunity and reduce the risk of outbreaks in polio-free areas and conduct mop-up activities as appropriate.
- Strengthen surveillance of acute flaccid paralysis to improve responsiveness to potential outbreaks.

To learn more about the roles and responsibilities of UNICEF and other GPEI partners, visit:
<http://www.polioinfo.org/index.php/about-us/partners>